

Some Early Botanical Loan Words Shared by Armenian and Semitic

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Classical Armenian is a language that has maintained very little of its inheritable Indo-European lexicon. Since its separation from the proto-family, Armenian has managed to absorb certain words from Hurrian and Urartian, perhaps some from Hittite, a large abundance from Parthian, and a smaller amount from Greek and Syriac. In the later Classical period additional words were absorbed from Persian, and there was an Arabic intrusion. These constitute the words whose loan origins can be identified. There is an equal bulk of words in earliest Armenian that cannot be identified at all, and whose origins remains wholly a mystery. These loan words, from what is thought to be a wide variety of sources, constitute a body of roots that certainly exceeds the Indo-European words continued in Armenian. In the realm of word-stock, Armenian can be identified as a net borrower.

This paper will examine a small segment of this borrowed vocabulary, those words, botanical in nature, that came into Armenian by loan from such sources as Greek, Syriac, Iranian or elsewhere, yet which coexist in Semitic languages. This vocabulary is of two sources: it can be originally of Semitic origin, or, as is often the case, it would come from a third source into both Semitic and Armenian. This third source, at least for botanical terms, is usually the Indic realm, from the Himalayas to the southern Dravidian lands.

Yet this vocabulary has been little studied. Hübschmann identified some of it as Semitic and other of it as Greek, noting particularly the direct means through which the word passed into Armenian

rather than its ultimate source. Thus a word such as Arm. *nardos* 'nard' is said to be a Greek loan word (AG 366) even though it is most likely that Greek got *váρδος* from a North Semitic¹ dialect (cf. Heb. *nêrd*), and Semitic speakers in turn got the word from India.² And similarly there are other Armenian words that are said to be Persian, yet it is clear that these words are of an origin still more eastern, whence Persian got the term. Other words, for which Hübschmann suggested a direct loan origin, are actually of an unknown origin and are only shared by Armenian and the language Hübschmann suggested as the loan source. Hübschmann, for instance, suggests (AG 381) that Arm. *steplin* 'carrot' is from Gk. *σταφυλῖνος* yet we now know that loan words from Greek into Armenian arrive in a phonetic shape that differs little from the Greek form. Arm. *steplin* cannot be from Gk. *σταφυλῖνος*; we would expect **stap'lin*.

Much has happened in the 90 years since Hübschmann wrote about Semitic loan words in Armenian, and much is understood about Semitic loan words in Greek³ that was unknown when Hübschmann was working on the problem. This paper will review a certain portion of those loan words in Armenian that share parallels in Semitic. It will be shown that some of these words, loaned into Armenian from Greek, are ultimately Semitic; other words merely passed through Semitic, often via Syriac, into Armenian, coming from a distant and unknown source.

These words are accordingly broken down into four patterns:

- A. Words taken directly from Semitic
- B. Words taken directly from Greek
- C. Words taken directly from Persian
- D. Words of an eastern origin.

In all instances these words are held commonly in Armenian and Semitic, though in most instances they were held in Semitic before being passed on, directly or indirectly, to Armenian.

A.1. Arm. *šušmay* 'sesame, *Sesamum indicum* L.' Known first in the *Geoponica*⁴ (10th C.; Venice 1877.172). The term, as noted by Hübschmann (AG 314) is taken directly from Syriac *šušmā*; there is also Gk. *σησαμή*, Aram. *šūmšēmā*, Ugr. *ššmn*, Arab. *simsim* (> Georg. *simsimi*). Akkadian has *šamaššamu*, the parts of which Von Soden⁵ identifies as *šaman* 'oil' and *šommin* 'medicinal plant'. The plant is native to the Semitic realm, and Masson (1967.57) states that sesame has been cultivated in Mesopotamia for millennia, and is identified as early as 2050 BC, in the third dynasty of Ur, according to Thompson 1949.101. It is presumably this source from which are derived Hurr. *šumišumi-* and Hitt. *šammamma-*. A word for 'sesame' is known in

Armenian since the fifth century, and it is knč'it', from MP kunčit.

A.2. Arm. šušan 'lily, *Lilium elegans* L.' Bible and following literature, and taken (AG 314) from Syriac šōšannəθā (pl.). The term can be traced from Egyptian sšsn > šsn, whence the Semitic forms: Heb. šušan, Arab. sawsan; thence to Greek σοῦσον, Phl. sūsan, NPer. sūsan, Georgian შოშანი.⁶ Thompson (1949.11) says that Akk. šišanu 'reed flower' is not related. The history of this loan word is exceptionally clear.

A.3. Arm. k'rķ'um 'saffron, crocus, *Crocus sativus* L'.⁷ Bible and following literature. A loan into Armenian directly from Syriac kurkəmā.⁸ The crocus is wide-spread in the Mediterranean and southwest Asia, and noted especially in the region around Cilicia, in Anatolia. Terms for the crocus are extensively distributed in Semitic: Akk. kurkanū, Heb. karkōm, Arab. kurkur, and then in Iranian as MP kurkum (kwlkwm). Georgian k'rök'oni could be from Syriac where k > Georg. k'. Sanskrit derived kurukuma⁹ which assuredly had an original shape of *kurkuma- since that is what appears in Tibetan qur-qum. Gk. κορόνος is derived from the same source as the Semitic where the root k-r-k-m is known only in this instance. Masson (1967.51) sees its origin as Asia Minor, especially Cilicia, for the most sought-after saffron was korykios, from Mt. Korykos, a promontory in Cilicia overlooking the sea.

A.4. Arm. haluē 'aloë, Aloë perryi.' Bible and following. The Semitic words are all for aloë wood, *Aloëxylon agallochum* L.: Heb. ḥālōt,¹⁰ ḥulim (pl.), Syr. alwā, Arab. ՚aluwwa¹¹ (> Per. ՚alwā). This word specifically referred to the fragrant gum derived from the inner core of the aloë wood. It was to shift to the fragrant gum that was derived from the Aloë perryi, native to the island of Socotra,¹² south of the Aden peninsula. Here it was represented by Gk. ἀλόη, Arm. haluē and Georg. halo. Hübschmann (AG 360) says the word is taken from Syriac, and this is possible,¹³ though Arm. haluē is possibly from the Arabic ՚aluwwa as filtered through North Semitic. The term originates in India, where we find Skt. agaru-, uguru- 'aloë wood' which is in turn from Dravidian; see Tamil, Malayalam akil, Kannada agil, Tulu agilu 'aloë wood'. It seems likely that a Dravidian form, interpreted in Sanskrit as agaru- passed into Semitic as Heb. ḥal(-u-),¹⁴ (Greppin 1988A). The aspiration in Arm. haluē is inexplicable, but has parallels.¹⁵ The Georgian term, halo, is early, known from the Adishi manuscript of the Bible,¹⁶ and might be a loan from Armenian.

A.5. Arm. hagni 'chaste tree, *Vitex agnus-castus* L.' Known from the Bible and following literature. The term is not noted in Hübschmann, but is parallel to Gk. ἄγνος, with no aspiration, in Lev 23.40. It

would seem that *hagni* is from Semitic '-g-n 'shut oneself off, especially from marriage'.¹⁷ In Greek ritual the branches of the ἄγνος were strewn by matrons on their beds at the Thesmophoria, that being a festival at Athens and elsewhere in honor of Demeter, an Asiatic goddess of complicated purpose. The Greek word ἄγνος 'chaste', with aspiration, clearly developed with some mutual contamination from ἄγνος 'chaste tree', and folk etymology might have pulled an earlier form of ἄγνος 'chaste tree' into its present shape, which so closely approximates ἄγνος 'chaste'. Lewy (1895.50) suggested an original segolate noun *'egen, but the word is ignored entirely in Masson (1967). The word is known only in Greek and Armenian and hypothetically in North Semitic, and its movement into Armenian, as *hagni*, with aspiration, is unclear. If it were a Greek loan into Armenian the final -i would be very difficult to find a parallel for or explain otherwise; the secondary aspiration of *hagni* can in no way be derived from the initial Semitic 'ayin.¹⁸ The h- could be explained as parallel to the similar aspiration in *hoktember* 'October', but this is not wholly satisfying. A precise origin for *hagni* cannot be given, but a Semitic source of some sort is more likely than Greek ἄγνος.

A.6. Arm. *hamem* 'cardamom, *Amomum cardamom* L.'; later 'coriander, *Coriandrum sativum* L.' The term is known from the earliest level of the Galen Dictionary, perhaps 6th C. (Greppin 1985.9)¹⁹ but in the verbal form *hamemel* 'to season', it appears in the Bible. The root is of Semitic origin, ְהַמֵּם 'be warm',²⁰ but as a noun is demonstrated only in Arab. ְהָמָם 'cardamom'. The Greek derivative is probably ἄμωμον but this is acknowledged neither by Frisk (GEW) nor Masson (1967). The existence of Mishnaic ְהָמָם 'indian spice bush' (Lewy 1895.50) might imply that the term for 'cardamom' is borrowed from the East and shaped itself to the root ְהַמֵּם by folk etymology.²¹ Cardamom was probably taken by the Semites in trade from India; the Armenian substitution of coriander for *hamem* in later times (Ghazarian 1981.22) was made possible by the similarity of the fragrance of their seeds, yet the considerably easier access to coriander, which was native to the Middle East.

B.1. Arm. *kasia* 'cassia, *Cassia* L.' An aromatic plant similar to cinnamon, but whose bark is inferior in flavor. Bible and following literature. The Hebrew is qəššā 'powdered bark, like cinnamon'; Akkadian has kusū which appears in Late Babylonian as *kasia* 'black mustard, *Sinapis nigra* L. (now more commonly *Brassica nigra* Koch.)', which is possibly related. Cassia is thought to be a plant from India or further east, and the word, too, is probably from that direction. The Indian cassia is *Cassia fistula* L., a flowering tree thirty feet

tall, and native to south India and Ceylon. Though North Semitic q is reflected by Arm. k, the emphatic š is represented rather strictly by Arm. c (Arm. *cnc̪luy* ‘cymbal,’ Syr. *šešṣelâ*) or c’ (kac’ in ‘ax’, Syr. *xaṣṣfnâ*) and the immediate origin of Arm. *kasia* must be Gk. *κασία*, not Syr. *qəši’â*. Other examples are found in Steiner 1982, 47-50.

B.2. Arm. *kinamomon* ‘cinnamon, *Cinnamomum zeylanicum* Nees’. Bible and following literature. The Greek word, *κιννάμωμον*, is said by Herodotus²² to be of Phoenician origin though the word is not otherwise known in that lexical inventory. Theophrastus²³ says the plant comes from Arabia. There exists Heb. *qinnamón*, and the Dravidian origin is seen in Malayalam *kainamanis*. The Armenian comes directly from the Greek, as noted by Hübschmann (AG 356).

B.3. Arm. *mološ* ‘mallow, *Malva silvestris* L.’ The term is late in Armenian, not appearing in the Bark’ Galianos, and no sooner than Mkhitar Heratsi (12th C.; Venice 1832.95). In the Bible mallow is known by Arm. *bakarj*. The -š of Arm. *mološ* developed out of medieval Greek χ, for in Byzantine times χ became a palatal fricative, a sound similar to that heard in High German ich. Greek derived the word from Semitic: Heb. *mallūah*; there is a further loan to Georgian *maloki*, seen also in Laz *moloki*. We elsewhere find Gk. χ as middle Armenian š in Arm. *šloros* ‘yellow-green’, from Gr. χλωρός. Hübschmann (AG 366) notes Greek derivation but does not acknowledge Semitic origin.

B.4. Arm. *latan* ‘ladanum-resin, from the *Cistus ladaniferus* L.’ The term appears in Pseudo-Khorenatsi’s Geography (7th C.; Venice 1865.603); *latan* might also appear in the Bark’ Galianos (Greppin 1985.164), spelled as *elitan*, and the corruption of the term implies it was in the dictionary at an early time, perhaps sixth century. It is firmly in Mkhitar Heratsi (12th C.; Venice 1832.96). In spite of the thought that the medial -t-, from Gk. λῆδον would represent a late spelling, showing Western Dialect shift, the -t- seems to be early and legitimate. There are Semitic cognates: Akk. *ladañu*, Arab. *lādōn* (> Per. *lādan*); Georgian *ladana*²⁴ is probably of Semitic origin or Asiatic Greek. The plant is native to the Near East and is known elsewhere in the old world.

B.5. Arm. *nardos* ‘nard, *Nardos stricta* L.’ Bible and following literature. The term, as pointed out by Hübschmann (AG 367), is from Gk. νάρδος, which is in turn from Semitic: Heb. *nērd*, Arab. *nārdīn*, Aram. *nārd(ēn)*, Akk. *lardu* (the shift to l- has parallels);²⁵ the ultimate origin is further east. Note Skt. *náladam* ‘id’. However, a possible proto-Semitic *nađáh* could have generated both the Indic and Semitic forms, for which see Mayrhofer KEWA 2.140. However, nard is

native to the Himalayas, and an Indic origin seems more likely. The plant is used to make a perfumed oil, usually from its dried roots, though young stems can also be used. That Indian species is the *Nardostachys jatamansi* DC.

B.6. Arm. *zmuis* 'myrrh.' Bible and following literature. Cognates are Gk. σμύρνα, μύρρα (Aeol.), ζμύρνα (New Testament); Syr. mûrâ, Arab. mur, Heb. môr, Akk. murru from the Semitic root *m-r-r* 'be bitter'; Georgian *muri* (possibly from Arab. *mur*; known from Adishi MS, 897AD). It is not clear from what source Armenian derived *zmuis*. Hübschmann (AG 393) is unsure and certainly the most likely guess, Greek, from New Testament ζμύρνα, offers no explanation for the final -*s* of Arm. *zmuis*. But alternatives leave us only the Semitic languages, which lack not only the final -*s* but the initial *z*. It seems best to assume a Greek origin, though there must have been some mysterious secondary interference.

C.1. Arm. čandan 'sandal wood, *Santalum album* L.' First in Pseudo-Khorenatsi's Geography (7th C.; Venice 1865.615); later in the Fables of Mkhitar Goš (13th C.; Venice 1854.49), where the form has changed to čandi.

The term is from Persian čandan (AG 187), and is probably ultimately of Dravidian origin (Tamil čāntu, via Skt. *candana*-). The term appears in Semitic as Arab. ḥandal, Asor. sandal; Greek has σάνδαλον 'sandal wood' and σαντάλινος²⁶ 'made of sandal wood'; Georgian sandali is from a Semitic source. The alternative of λ and ν in Gk. σάνδαλον and σαντάλινος possibly reflects the l-n variation known in Semitic.

C.2. Arm. č'aman 'cumin, *Cuminum cyminum* L.' Bible and following literature. Hübschmann (AG 394) sees the word as of uncertain origin, but a Persian origin from an unattested *caman is likely, projected from Turk. čemen 'id'. Greek has κύμινον, Myc. kumina, which are no doubt from Semitic: Heb. kammon, Syr. kammônâ, Phoen. չպուն,²⁷ Arab. kammûn, Akk. kamunu. The plant cumin is widely distributed, and the word is possibly not of Semitic origin since the root *k-m-n* 'be hidden, be secret' does not apply to cumin.

D.1. Arm. kupr 'pitch, often from the cypress tree.' Bible and following literature. Hübschmann suggests Syriac origin (AG 308): Syr. kûfrâ, Heb. kôfer, Arab. kufr, Akk. kupru; and note Elamite čupar; Gk. κυπάρισσος, Mycenaean kuparowe 'cypress tree'; Georg. k'up'ri 'pitch' (< Armenian ?). If the term were from Syriac, we would expect Arm. *k'up'r. Diakonoff (per litt.) suggests a Hurrian intermediary, which is possible.

D.2. Arm. steplin 'carrot, *Daucos carota* L.' A late term, not

known in Armenian until the *Geponica* (13th C.; Venice 1877.74). Gk. σταφυλίνος, Syr. esṭaflīn, Arab. iṣṭaflīn; Georg. სტაფილი (st'apilo, Teğeevi 1975.43). There is no earlier word for carrot in Armenian, and one may assume that it was not a significant part of their diet, nor used significantly in Armenian medicine. The *Bark' Galianos* glosses Gk. δαῦκος as steplin and secondarily as gazar (= Arab. جاز gazar, jazar), but it is clearly a late addition to the Galen Dictionary. Both Semitic words must be loans from Greek; the Syriac word is known from the Syriac version of the *Geponica* (Lagarde 1860.98), and the Arabic term, quite uncommon, is known from al-Biruni's *Materia Medica* (Said 1973.108), where al-Biruni states clearly that the term is a Greek loan.²⁸ Neither the Armenian nor the Georgian word could have come from the Greek (and certainly not from the Semitic for we would expect Armenian -f- for -p-), for we have seen that loans from that language must enter Armenian phonetically most exactly. The word has come equally into Armenian, Georgian, and Greek from an unknown source. The carrot is thought to be of Central Asian origin and the word came to Armenian from the east, on the lips of traders (Greppin 1986).

NOTES

¹ There are three principal Semitic dialect groups, the most ancient being the Eastern, composed of Akkadian, the oldest samples of which date from the middle of the third millennium. By 2000 BC there were two separate dialects, Babylonian, of the southern part, and Assyrian, the language of the northern part. The Northern group (North-West) is composed of the Canaanite dialects: Hebrew, Phoenician, Moabite, and Ugaritic; the Aramaic dialects including Syriac. South Semitic includes Arabic and Ethiopic (Ga'əz).

² Trade between India and the Semites, particularly in South Arabia, goes back to the second millennium, and can be precisely dated by the appearance in texts of loan words. Hebrew speakers were acquiring Dravidian vocabulary by the early first millennium.

³ The finding of Phoenician vocabulary in Mycenaean Greek is of great interest. Masson (1967.123) lists 33 separate instances, and Herodotus would speak of words received from the Phoenicians (3.111).

⁴ The Armenian *Girk' Vastakoc'*, though quite similar to the Greek *Geponica*, is clearly not taken directly from the Greek. Rather, it has been shown to be taken from an Arabic tract, in turn taken from the Syriac version, that was translated from a Greek forerunner of the *Geponica* compiled by Vindanius Anatolius of Berytus (4th C.). Here see Greppin 1987.

⁵ Here see Von Soden 1952.74, and AHW 3.1155.

⁶ The form šrošani is known from the Adishi MS of the Bible, the oldest clearly datable Georgian text. This same form, with inexplicable -r-, has been continued into Modern Georgian (Makašvili 1961.241).

⁷ There are, in all, twenty-four species of crocus, and we cannot guess which one is exactly referred to; the *Crocus sativus* L. is merely the best known of the species, and so used here.

⁸ Syriac p, t, k are reflected in Armenian as p', t', k' while the velar q comes across as Arm. k, without aspiration. Exceptions to this rule are rare.

⁹ In this case it seems best to assume a reverse loan, from Western Asia to India. The term is known fairly early, in the works of Kālidāsa, from the first century BC.

¹⁰ The forms plurale tantum might be explained by the *ahalu-, which was interpreted in Hebrew as a plural, īhalōt.

¹¹ This word is most uncommonly known in Arabic, being largely cited in the lexicographers; but the text of ad-Dinawari's *Kitāb an-Nabāt*, discovered in Istanbul in 1947 by M. Hamidullah of Osmania University, held it and it appears as: aluwwa wa-uluwwa, wa-kilāhumā min asmā' (al-)alanjūj alladhi dharknā. "Aluwwa and uluwwa: both of them are from the word alanjūj that was mentioned before." Alanjūj is identified by Lewin (1953.21) as aloë wood. The Arabic text appears in Lewin 1953, section 40.

¹² An export of this gum continues from Socotra till this day.

¹³ But one wonders if perhaps the Armenian form should't be *alva, if taken from Syr. alwā.

¹⁴ Contemporary South Dravidian dialects interpret an original *k, in intervocalic position, as -k-, -g-, and as -x- or -g- (Zvelebil 1970.119-120), and it could have been a form parallel to the fricatives that was interpreted in the Semitic realm as -h-.

¹⁵ Note Arm. hoktember 'October'.

¹⁶ The use of Georg. halo in John 19.39 parallels the Armenian usage.

¹⁷ Here see Ruth 1.13: tē'igēnāh lavlīt hēyōth lē'is "Would you shut yourself off so as not to belong to a man?"

¹⁸ Here note Syr. 'ēđen, which yielded Arm. adin 'the garden of Eden', and Arm. urbat 'friday' = Syr. 'erûwaθā.

¹⁹ The Galen Dictionary is of at least two clear levels, the first and original compilation of Greek-Armenian isoglosses which are likely part of the Hellenizing period, from the 6th century. Then there is a later section in which Arabic vocabulary as well as animal and bird names are brought in. This latter part, which seems to have included some additional plant names as well, is in an orthographic state much less

corrupt than the earliest level of the dictionary, which is in numerous cases impossible to interpret.

²⁰ Semitic *ḥ* usually is reflected as *x* in Armenian loans; note Arm. *xarb* 'sword', Syr. *ḥarbā*. But Arm. *h-* is elsewhere known: Arm. *haši* 'account, reckoning', Syr. *ḥešiv*.

²¹ The 'heat' of cardamom is not specifically noted in Galen (Kühn XI.828) though Galen does say cardamom is similar to sweet flag, which he describes as having warmth, though the degree is not stated (Kühn XI.820): ὅθεν δῆλον φς θερμή τὸν δύναμίν ἔστιν.

²² Herodotus 3.111: ἡμεῖς δέ το Φοινίκων μαθόντες κινάρωμον καλέομεν.

²³ Theophrastus Historia plantarum 9.7.2: Τὰ μὲν ἐξ Ἰνδῶν κομίζεται κακεῖθεν.

²⁴ And Georgian *ladana* is not known from the earliest level of Georgian, but is, rather, a medieval word, lacking in Abuladze 1973.

²⁵ For this alternation of *l* and *n*, note also Akk. *lamṣatu* and *namṣatu* 'fly'. There are other examples.

²⁶ This nu/lambda difference might reflect the Semitic alternatives. In addition to the Akkadian examples cited above, we also have examples in North Semitic: here see Phoenician *bl* 'son,' for common Semitic *bn*.

²⁷ This word appears in Dioscorides RV 3.59, and 'Αφροτ must mean Punic.

²⁸ "In Greek it is known as *iṣṭafīlinūs* from which the Arabic derives *iṣṭafīlin*." The text of al-Biruni is not pointed, and Said (1970.134) takes  as *oṣṭafīlin* though the lexicographers give *iṣṭafīlin*.

ABBREVIATIONS

AG = Heinrich Hübschmann. *Armenische Grammatik, Breitkopf und Härtel*. Leipzig 1897. Reprinted Georg Olms. Hildesheim. 1962.

AHW = Wolfram von Soden. *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*. Otto Harrassowitz. Wiesbaden. 1965-1981.

GEW = Hjalmar Frisk. *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Carl Winter. Heidelberg. 1960-1970.

KEWA = Manfred Mayrhofer. *Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen*. Carl Winter. Heidelberg. 1956-1980.

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